

New finds and new results at Aphrodisias in 2016

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Aphrodisias has been excavated continuously since 1961 under the aegis of New York University, and the site illuminates brilliantly the life and art of ancient cities in the eastern Mediterranean, from Roman imperial times into the post-classical world. The current project focuses on the documentation, conservation and publication of already excavated monuments and on targeted new excavation and research, aiming to understand better the character and history of the site from the Roman into the late antique, Byzantine and Ottoman periods.

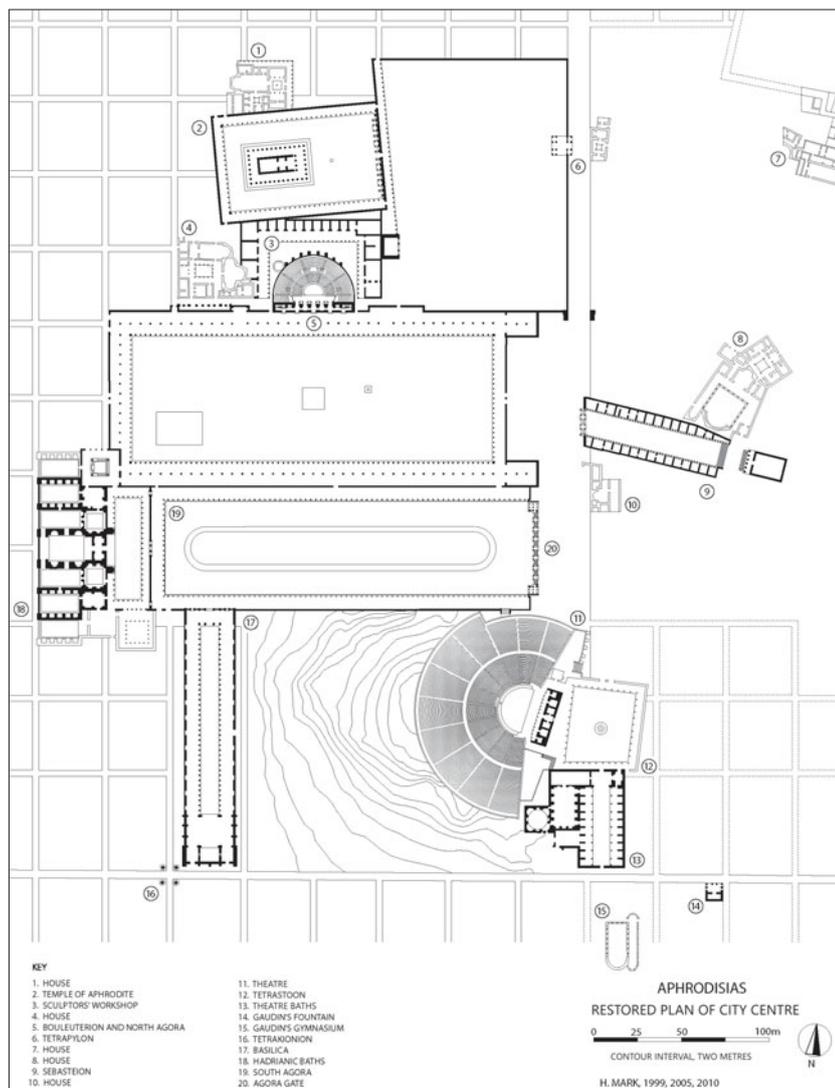
In 2016, the Aphrodisias team worked a long season, from 1 June to 30 September. There were some 60 of us, both students and colleagues – archaeologists, architects, conservators, epigraphists, restorers, surveyors, photographers, draftsmen and numismatists – together with 96 local workers. There were important results and interesting finds.



View of Aphrodisias

The South Agora and Tetracylon Street

Excavation was concentrated on two longstanding projects – in the South Agora and on the Tetracylon Street – both parts of a plan to create an enhanced visitor route through the centre of the site, from the Sebasteion to the Tetracylon Street to the South Agora.



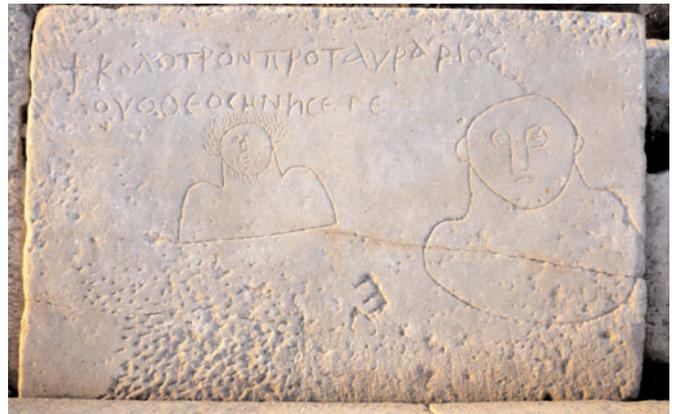
The South Agora is dominated by a 170m pool, partly excavated in the 1980s. After a detailed survey of its water system in 2011 and test trenches in 2012 that revealed planting trenches for palm trees around the pool, a five-year project was begun in 2013. This is generously funded by Mica Ertegün and called *The Mica and Ahmet Ertegün South Agora Pool Project*. The project is designed to complete the excavation of the pool and to research its long archaeo-history and that of the surrounding palm grove.

Excavation in 2016 investigated the overlying medieval and post-medieval levels, as well as the plantings surrounding the pool. One large trench (Sag 16.1) was excavated in phase across the eastern half of the complex and reached below the marble seat courses of the pool's inner perimeter. The marble surround of the pool is now almost fully exposed.

In addition to some important marble finds, perhaps the most striking aspect of the excavation was the high level of post-antique and medieval activity across the whole area. Far from being empty fill, the levels above the pool have a complex sequence of walls and strata from approximately the tenth through to the 16th century, accompanied by significant deposits of glass and metal slag. They imply a level of human activity not previously expected at the site in these periods.

Among an abundance of coins, small finds and marble fragments of architecture and statuary, two items may be mentioned. A newly uncovered slab of the pool's southern perimeter was found to be inscribed with a semi-public graffito, prefaced by a cross, for one 'Kolotron, head gold-worker (*protaurios*), whom God shall remember' (I 16.20). The text is accompanied by two engraved frontal busts of athletes: one (left) wearing an elaborate victor's crown; the other a much larger bust (right) of a thick-necked boxer or wrestler. This athlete has a single lock of hair emerging from his otherwise clean-shaven head – the hairstyle of the professional heavy athlete (*cirrus in vertice*). The same Kolotron is known from a similar seat inscription in the Theatre.

A fragment of an early imperial portrait head (inv. 16-52) was excavated during the cutting back of the east section of the pool fill at the eastern limit of SAg 16.1, where the 1990 excavation of the eastern end of the pool had stopped. Two dumps full of roof tile, pieces of wall revetment and small fragments of carved marble were uncovered here, on the northern side of the pool. The head fragment was found in the lower dump layer in what was probably an early seventh-century context. The head was once part of a high-quality portrait statue of the Julio-Claudian period. Its nose, upper face and hair fringe are perfectly preserved. The quality of the portrait can be seen in the delicate carving of the line of its upper teeth in the slightly opened mouth.



The newly uncovered graffito

The Tetrapylon Street runs north to south from the Tetrapylon to the Propylon of the Sebasteion. Its excavation, begun in 2008, is designed to open this part of the street for visitors and to bring new information about the history of the site in the late antique, Byzantine and Ottoman periods.

Excavation in 2016 concentrated on the deep overburden covering the street immediately south of the Propylon of the Sebasteion (SAve 16.1-3). The aim is to extend the street excavation to the south to connect it with the back of the Agora Gate at the original Roman level, both to enhance visitor circulation at the site and to investigate a key urban hub in the ancient city plan.



The South Agora pool



The Tetrapylon Street

The eastern half of the excavation area was occupied by several subsequent street levels. At the eastern limit of the trenches, the street had always been bordered by a sizeable wall. In origin, this was a Roman wall that defined the western line of a well-preserved complex known as the Cryptoporticus House. In later periods, unmortared rubble was added on top of the Roman wall remains, but it is clear from the excavation of several walls oriented east to west across its line that for a long period after the seventh century this area was no longer used as a street.

The western half of the excavated area was occupied by a sizeable, well-built structure (visible in the foreground of the photo on the previous page). The excavation has so far uncovered its two most northern spaces, both of which had been intentionally filled in, probably in the later 19th century. The eastern space was a water tank, lined with hydraulic mortar, supplied by a pipe coming from the south and heated by a praefurnium on its eastern side. The larger western room had a hypocaust and water supply provided by a pipe from the tank that runs around the eastern and northern walls of the room. It was clearly the hot room of a small bath complex, of the middle to late Byzantine period. Since bath complexes of this period are rare, this excavated example is of considerable significance.

To the north of the Propylon, work aimed to excavate large brickfalls that had been left in situ on the Roman pavement in 2014 and 2015, in order to open the street and to carry out conservation work on its paving. Three areas of brickfall that collapsed in the early seventh century from the western street wall were drawn, photographed and excavated (NAve 16.1). The southern brickfall lay directly on top of the street paving; the ‘middle’ brickfall came from two arches of the upper storey of the eastern street colonnade; and the northern brickfall lay on top of a thick layer of burned and unburned material, including window glass.

Part of this third context contained a large and important female head (inv. 16-15). It is a veiled portrait of the early imperial period that clearly once belonged to the extensive statue display on the Sebasteion’s Propylon. It has an ideal Augustan physiognomy with the tight melon-hairstyle of a young woman. The trial attachment of the head to a surviving statue from the Propylon found nearby in 1981 (inv. 81-151), although it does not join, showed that they almost certainly belong together. Furthermore, the statue is identified independently, by its inscribed base (inv. 82-210), as Aemilia Lepida, wife of Drusus Caesar (son of Germanicus). She appears prominently in history only in AD 36 when she was forced to commit suicide, the Roman historian Tacitus tells us (*Annals* 6.40), because she was conducting a widely known affair with a slave. Such matters, however, were not of much concern in Aphrodisias. The newly excavated head completes a remarkably well-documented honorific statue of a Tiberian princess, one who is not identified in any other portraits.

The Hadrianic Baths, Sebasteion and Tetrapylon

A major conservation project in the Hadrianic Baths, begun in 2010, was pursued for a final season with work on the main fabric of the complex. The Baths, partly excavated in 1904–1905 and the 1960s, were in a bad state of deterioration. After seven years of work, the excavated Rooms 6, 7, 13 and 14 have now been conserved and opened to the public; Rooms 4, 5 and 12 have also been conserved and can be viewed from the exterior; and Room 15, the great palaestra court in front of the Baths, has been cleared and made accessible to visitors.

In 2016, conservation work was concentrated in the great central hot room of the complex, the caldarium (Room 4), and on the tall masonry support wall between Rooms 4 and 5. A find of considerable historical significance was made in Room 4: a well-preserved bronze coin of the emperor Phokas (AD 602–610) was recovered from the mortar layer immediately beneath some loose marble paving. It implies that significant renovations were still being undertaken in the early seventh century at a time when previously no such civic vitality had been suspected.

The physical anastylosis of the three-storeyed South Building of the Sebasteion is now mostly completed. In 2016, work was carried out at the back of the structure,



The statue of Aemilia Lepida



The Hadrianic Baths



The South Building of the Sebasteion

building up the rear wall in petit-appareil-style masonry to act as a brace and support for the whole anastylosis. The first physical assembly of all parts of the Propylon's first storey is also now complete, and it was decided not to dowel and glue the columns and entablatures permanently but to leave them dry-fixed as they are, in case further work proves possible. Important advances were made in 2016 in the study of the Sebasteion's building history. Careful cleaning and recording revealed that in late antiquity a water basin (9.25m wide) was built up against the front of the Sebasteion Temple at a time when it had been put out of use as a cult building.

The Tetracylon, the grandiose entrance to the domain of Aphrodite, was the subject of an anastylosis project carried out by Kenan Erim in the years 1983–1990. The anastylosis is checked and maintained periodically, and, in 2016, the western side of the structure was scaffolded, cleaned, pointed and thoroughly checked. Open joints and cracks between repairs and the marble of the ancient building were mapped and filled using hydraulic lime-based mortars. Some of the abstractly restored figure and acanthus decoration of the pediment was remodelled and recoloured by hand to match the character of the surrounding stonework, using the Keim Restauro system.

Research and publication

Research for publication remains a high priority, and in 2016 publication study was pursued on the Stadium, Bouleuterion, North Agora, Byzantine architectural ornament and the Roman and Byzantine phases of the Temple of Aphrodite.

New Aphrodisias publications in 2016 include P. Stinson, *Aphrodisias VII. The Civil Basilica* and R.R.R. Smith, J. Lenaghan, A. Sokolicek and K. Welch (eds), *Aphrodisias Papers 5: Excavation and Research at Aphrodisias, 2006–2012* (Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplement 103).

Extensive work was carried out during the 2016 season in support of three new monographs currently in press or in final preparation: (1) N. de Chaisemartin and D.

Theodorescu, *Aphrodisias VIII. Le Théâtre d'Aphrodisias: les structures sceniques*; (2) J. van Voorhis, *Aphrodisias IX. The Sculptor's Workshop*; (3) E. Ögüş, *Aphrodisias X. The Columnar Sarcophagi*.

Acknowledgements

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The Propylon